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SHAM

A SOCIAL SATIRE IN ONE ACT

BY FRANK G. TOMPKINS



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S H A M

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By Frank G. Tompkins.

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HEARTS TO MEND, a Fantasy in One Act.

By H. A. Overstreet.

Originally produced by the Fireside Players, White Plains, N. Y.

Bound in Art Paper. Others to follow.

SHAM

A SOCIAL SATIRE

By
FRANK G. TOMPKINS

Originally produced by Sam Hume as the dedicatory piece
of the new Arts & Crafts Theatre, Detroit, and by
Maurice Browne of the Chicago Art Theatre.



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SHAM

BY FRANK G. TOMPKINS

Three people: CHARLES, *the householder.*
CLARA, *his wife.*
THE THIEF.

Scene: A darkened room.

After a moment the door opens, admitting a streak of light. A man peers in cautiously. As soon as he is sure that the room is unoccupied, he steps inside and feels along the wall until he finds the switch which floods the room with light. He is dressed in impeccable taste—evidently a man of culture. From time to time he bites appreciatively on a ham sandwich as he looks about him, apparently viewing the room for the first time. Nothing pleases him until a vase over the mantel catches his eye. He picks it up, looks at the bottom, puts it down hard, and mutters, "Imitation." Other articles receive the same disdainful verdict. The whole room is beneath his notice. He starts to sit down before the fire and enjoy his sandwich. Suddenly he pauses to listen, looks about him hurriedly for some place to hide, thinks better of it, and takes his stand opposite the door, smiling pleasantly and expectantly. The door opens and a young woman enters with a man at her heels. As she sees the thief she stifles a scream and retreats, backing the man out behind her. The thief smiles and waits. Soon

MS 7 Oct. 1920.

SHAM

the door opens again, and the man enters with the woman clinging to him. They stand opposite the thief and stare at him, not sure what they ought to say or do.

THIEF

(pleasantly) Good evening! *(pause)* Good evening, good evening. You surprised me. Can't say I expected you home so soon. Was the play an awful bore? *(pause)* We-e-ell, can't one of you speak. I CAN carry on a conversation alone, but the question-and-answer method is usually preferred. If one of you will ask me how I do, we might get a step farther.

CLARA

(breathlessly) You—you—*(with growing conviction)* You're a thief!

THIEF

Exactly. And you, madame? The mistress of the house, I presume. Or are you another thief? The traditional one that it takes to catch the first?

CLARA

This—this is OUR house. Charles, why don't you do something? Don't stand there like a— Make him go away! Tell him he mustn't take anything. *(Advancing toward the thief and speaking all in one sentence)* What have you taken? Give it to me instantly. How dare you! Charles, take it away from him.

CHARLES

(apparently not afraid, a little amused, but uncertain what to do, finally adopting the bullying tone) I say, old man, you'd better clear out.

S H A M

We've come home. You know you can't—come now, give it up. Be sensible. I don't want to use force—

THIEF

I don't want you to.

CHARLES

If you've got anything of ours— We aren't helpless, you know. (*He starts to draw something black and shiny from his overcoat pocket. It might be a pistol, but he does not reveal its shape.*)

THIEF

Let's see those glasses. Give them here (*takes them from the uncertain Charles*). Perhaps they're better than mine. Fine cases. (*Tries them*) Humph! Window glass! Take them back. You're not armed, you know. I threw your revolver down the cold-air shaft. Never carry one myself—in business hours. Yours was in the bottom of your bureau drawer. Bad shape, those bureau drawers were in. Nice and neat on top; rat's nest below. Shows up your character in great shape, old man. Always tell your man by his bureau drawers. Didn't it ever occur to you that a thief might drop in on you some night? What would he think of you?

CHARLES

I don't think—

THIEF

You should. I said to myself when I opened that drawer: "They put up a great surface, but they're shams. Probably streak that runs through everything they do." You ought to be-

S H A M

gin with real neatness. This other sort of thing is just a form of dishonesty.

CLARA

You! Talking to US about honesty—in our house!

THIEF

Just the place for honesty. Begins at home. Let's—

CLARA

Charles, I won't stand this? Grab hold of him. Search him. You hold him. I'll telephone.

THIEF

You can't.

CLARA

You've cut the wires.

THIEF

Didn't have to. Your telephone service has been cut off by the company. I found that out before I came. I suspect you neglected the bill. You ought not to, makes no end of trouble. Inconvenienced me this evening. Better get it put in right away.

CLARA

Charles, do I have to stand here and be insulted?

THIEF

Sit down. Won't you, please! This is your last ham-sandwich, so I can't offer you any, but there's plenty of beer in the cellar, if you care

S H A M

for it. I don't recommend it, but perhaps you're used to it.

CLARA (*almost crying*)

Charles, are you going to let him preach to us all night! I won't have it. Being lectured by a thief!

CHARLES

You can't stop a man's talking, my dear, especially this sort of man. Can't you see he's a born preacher? Old man, while advice is going round, let me tell you that you've missed your calling. Why don't you go in for reform? Ought to go big.

CLARA

Oh, Charles! Don't talk to him. You're a good deal bigger than he is.

THIEF

Maybe I'll jiu-jitsu him.

CLARA

He's insulting you now, Charles. Please try. I'll hold his feet.

THIEF

No doubt you would. But that wouldn't stop my talking. You'd be taking an unfair advantage, too; I couldn't kick a lady, could I? Besides, there are two of you. You leave it to Charles and me. Let's have fair play, at least.

CLARA

Fair play? I'd like to know—

THIEF

Ple-e-ase, don't screech! My head aches and

your voice pierces so. Let's sit down quietly and discuss the situation like well-bred people, and when we've come to some understanding, I'll go.

CLARA

Yes, after you've taken everything in the house and criticised everything else you can't take, our manners and our morals.

CHARLES

But he isn't taking anything now, is he? Let the poor chap criticise, can't you? I don't suppose he often meets his—er—customers socially. He's just dying for a good old visit. Lonesome profession, isn't it, old man?

CLARA

If you WON'T do anything, I'll call the neighbors.

THIEF

No neighbors to call. Nearest one a block away, and he isn't at home. That comes of living in a fashionable suburb. Don't believe you can afford it, either. WON'T you sit down, madame? I can't till you do. Well, then I shall have to stand, and I've been on my feet all day. It's hardly considerate (*plaintively*). I don't talk so well on my feet, either. It will take me much longer this way. (*Clara bounces into a chair, meaningfully*) Thank you, that's better (*sighs with relief as he sinks into the easy chair*) I knew I could appeal to your better nature. Have a cigarette? (*Charles accepts one from his beautiful case*) And you, madame?

S H A M

CLARA (*puts out her hand, but withdraws it quickly*)

Thank you, I don't care to smoke—with a thief.

THIEF

Right. Better not smoke, anyway. I'm so old-fashioned, I hate to see women smoke. None of the women in my family do it. Perhaps we're too conventional—

CLARA

I don't know that I care to be like the women of your family. I *will* have one, if you please. No doubt you get them from a man of taste.

THIEF

Your next-door neighbor. This is—was—his case. Exquisite taste. Seen this case often, I suppose? (*He eyes them closely*) Great friends? Or perhaps you don't move in the same circles. (*Clara glares at him*) Pardon me. Tactless of me, but how could I guess? Well, here's your chance to get acquainted with his cigarettes. Will you have one now?

CLARA

I don't receive stolen goods.

THIEF

That's a little hard on Charles, isn't it? He seems to be enjoying his.

CHARLES

Bully cigarette. Hempsted's a connoisseur. Truth is—we don't know the Hempsteds. They've never called.

SHAM

THIEF

That's right, Charles. Tell the truth and shame
(*with a jerk of his head toward Clara*)—you
know who.

CLARA

Charles, there isn't any reason, I'm sure—

THIEF

Quietly, please. Remember my head. I'm
sorry but I must decline to discuss your social
prospects with you, and also your neighbors'
shortcomings, much as we should all enjoy it.
There isn't time for that. Let's get down to
business. The question we've got to decide and
decide very quickly is, What would you like to
have me take?

CLARA (*aghast*)

What would we—what would we like to have
you take? Why—why—you can't take any-
thing now; we're here. Of all the nerve!
What would we like—

THIEF

It gains by repetition, doesn't it.

CHARLES

You've got me, old man. You'll have to come
again. I may be slow, but I don't for the mo-
ment see the necessity for your taking anything.

THIEF

I was afraid of this. I'll have to begin farther
back. Look here now, just suppose I go away
and don't take anything (*with an air of tri-
umph*) How would you like that?

SHAM

CHARLES

Suits me to a "T." How about you, my dear? Think you can be firm and bear up under it?

THIEF

Don't be sarcastic. You're too big. Only women and little men should be sarcastic. Besides, it isn't fair to me, when I'm trying to help you. Here am I, trying to get you out of a mighty ticklish situation, and you go and get funny. It isn't right.

CHARLES

Beg pardon, old man. Try us in words of one syllable. You see this is a new situation for us. But we're anxious to learn.

THIEF

Listen, then. See if you can follow this. Now there's nothing in your house that I want; nothing that I could for a moment contemplate keeping without a good deal of pain to myself.

CLARA

We're trying to spare you. But if you care to know, we had the advice of Elsie de Wolfe.

THIEF (*wonderingly*)

Elsie de Wolfe? Elsie, how could you! Now, if you had asked me to guess, I should have said—the Pullman Company. I shudder to think of owning any of this bric-a-brac myself. But it must be done. Here am I offering to burden myself with something I don't want, wouldn't keep for worlds, and couldn't sell. (*Growing a little oratorical*) Why do I do this?

SHAM

CHARLES

Yes, why do you?

CLARA

Hush, Charles; it's a rhetorical question; he wants to answer it himself.

THIEF

I do it to accommodate you. Must I be even plainer? Imagine that I go away, refusing to take anything in spite of your protests. Imagine it's to-morrow. The police and the reporters have caught wind of the story. Something has been taken from every house in Sargent Road—except one. The nature of the articles shows that the thief is a man of rare discrimination. To be quite frank—a connoisseur.

CLARA

A connoisseur of what? Humph!

THIEF

And a connoisseur of such judgment that to have him pass your Rubens by is to cast doubt upon its authenticity. I do not exaggerate. Let me tell you that from the Hempsteds—(*Clara leans forward, all interest*)—but that would take too long. (*She leans back*) The public immediately asks, Why did the thief take nothing from 2819 Sargent Road? The answer is too obvious: There is nothing worth taking at 2819 Sargent Road.

CHARLES (*comprehendingly*)

Um-hu-m!

THIEF

The public laughs. Worse still, the neighbors

S H A M

laugh. What becomes of social pretensions after that? It's a serious thing, laughter is. It puts anybody's case out of court. And it's a serious thing to have a thief pass you by. People have been socially marooned for less than that. Have I made myself clear? Are you ready for the question? What would you like to have me take?

CHARLES

Now, old man, I say that's neat. Sure you aren't a lawyer?

THIEF

I have studied the law—but not from that side.

CLARA

It's all bosh. Why couldn't we claim we'd lost something very valuable, something we'd never had?

THIEF (*solemnly*)

That's the most shameless proposal I've ever heard. Yes, you could *lie* about it. I can't conceal from you what I think of your moral standards.

CHARLES

I can't imagine you concealing anything unpleasant.

CLARA

It's no worse than—

THIEF

Your moral sense is blunted. But I can't attend to that now. Think of this: Suppose, as I said, I should take nothing and you should publish

that bare-faced lie, and then I should get caught. Would I shield you? Never. Or suppose I shouldn't get caught. Has no one entered your house since you have been here? Doesn't your maid know what you have? Can you trust her not to talk? No, no, it isn't worth the risk. It isn't even common sense, to say nothing of the moral aspects of the case. Why do people never stop to think of the practical advantages of having things stolen! Endless possibilities! Why, a woman loses a \$5 brooch and it's immediately worth \$15. The longer it stays lost, the more diamonds it had in it, until she prays God every night that it won't be found. Look at the advertising she gets out of it. And does she learn anything from it? Never. Let a harmless thief appear in her room and she yells like a hyena instead of saying to him, like a sensible woman: "Hands up; I've got you right where I want you; you take those imitation pearls off my dresser and get to hell out of here. If I ever see you or those pearls around here again, I'll hand you over to the police." That's what she ought to say. It's the chance of her life. But unless she's an actress, she misses it absolutely. A thief doesn't expect gratitude, but it seems to me he might at least expect understanding and intelligent co-operation. Here are you facing disgrace, and here am I willing to save you. And what do I get? Sarcasm, cheap sarcasm!

CHARLES

I beg your pardon, old man. I'm truly sorry. You're just too advanced for us. Clara, there's an idea in it. What do you think?

SHAM

CLARA

It has its possibilities. Now if he'll let me choose— Isn't there a joker in it somewhere? Let me think. We might let you have something. What do you want?

THIEF (*indignantly*)

What do I want? I—don't want—anything. Can't you see that? The question is, What do you want me to have? And please be a little considerate. Don't ask me to take the pianola or the ice-box. Can't you make up your minds. Let me help you. Haven't you got some old wedding gifts? Everybody has. Regular white elephants, yet you don't dare get rid of them for fear the donors will come to see you and miss them. A discriminating thief is a godsend. All you have to do is write: "Dear Maude and Fred: Last night our house was broken into, and of course the first thing that was taken was that lovely Roycroft chair you gave us." Or choose what you like. Here's opportunity knocking at your door. Make it something ugly as you please, but something genuine. I hate sham.

CLARA

Charles, it's our chance. There's that lovely, hand-carved—

THIEF

Stop! I saw it (*shuddering*) It has the marks of the machine all over it. Not that. I can't take that.

CLARA

Beggars shouldn't be—

SHAM

THIEF

Where's my coat? That settles it.

CLARA

Oh, don't go! I didn't mean it. Honestly I didn't. It just slipped out. You mustn't leave us like this—

THIEF

I don't have to put up with such—

CLARA

Oh, please stay, and take something! Haven't we anything you want? Charles, hold him; don't let him go. No, that won't do any good. Talk to him—

CHARLES

Don't be so sensitive, old man. She didn't mean it. You know how those old sayings slip out—just say themselves. She only called you a little beggar anyway. You ought to hear what she calls me sometimes.

THIEF

I don't want to. I'm not her husband. And I don't believe she does it in the same way, either. But I'm not going to be mean about this. I'll give you another chance. Trot out your curios.

CHARLES

How about this? Old luster set of Clara's grandmother's. I'm no judge of such things myself, but if you could use it, take it. Granddad gave it to her when they were sweethearts, didn't he, Clara?

SHAM

THIEF

That! Old luster? That jug won't be four years old its next birthday. Don't lay such things to your grandmother. Have some respect for the dead. If you gave more than \$3.98 for it, they saw you coming.

CLARA

You don't know anything about it. You're just trying to humiliate us because you know you have the upper hand.

THIEF

All right. Go ahead. Take your own risks.

CLARA

There's this Sheffield tray?

THIEF

No.

CHARLES

Do you like Wedgewood?

THIEF

Yes, where is it? (*Looks at it*) No.

CLARA

This darling hawthorne vase—

THIEF

Please take it away. It isn't hawthorne.

CHARLES

I suppose Cloisonne—

THIEF

If they were any of them what you call them. But they aren't.

SHAM

CHARLES

Well, if you'd consider burnt wood. That's a genuine burn.

THIEF

Nothing short of cremation would do it justice. Of course I've got to take one of them, if they're all you've got. But honestly, there isn't one genuine thing in this house, except Charles—and—and the ham sandwich.

CLARA (*takes miniature from cabinet*)

I wonder if you would treasure this as I do. It's very dear to me. It's grandmother—

THIEF (*suspiciously*)

Grandmother again?

CLARA

As a little girl. Painted on ivory. See that quaint old coral necklace. And those adorable yellow curls. And the pink circle comb. Would you like it?

THIEF

Trying to appeal to my sympathy. I've a good notion to take it to punish you. I wonder if it IS your grandmother. There isn't the slightest family resemblance. Look here!—it is!—it's a copy of the Selby miniature! Woman, do you know who that IS? It's Harriet Beecher Stowe at twelve. What have you done with my overcoat?

CHARLES

I give up. Here it is. Clara, that was too bad.

CLARA

I wanted to see if he'd know.

SHAM

CHARLES

There's no use trying to save us after this.
We'll just have to bear the disgrace.

THIEF

Charles, you're a trump! I'll even take that
old daub for YOU. Give it to me.

CHARLES

Wait a minute. You won't have to. Say,
Clara, where is that old picture of Cousin Paul?
It's just as bad as it pretends to be, if genuineness
is all you want.

THIEF (*suspiciously*)

Who is Cousin Paul? Don't try to ring in
Daniel Webster on me.

CHARLES

Cousin of mine. Lives on a farm near Madison,
Wisconsin.

THIEF

You don't claim the picture is by Sargent or
Whistler?

CLARA

It couldn't be—

THIEF (*ignoring her pointedly*)

Do you, Charles?

CHARLES

Certainly not. It's a water color of the purest
water, and almost a speaking likeness.

THIEF

I'll take Cousin Paul. Probably he has human
interest.

S H A M

CHARLES

That's the last thing I should have thought of in connection with Cousin Paul.

THIEF

Bring him, but wrapped, please. My courage might fail me if I saw him face to face.

CHARLES (*leaving room for picture*)

Mine always does.

THIEF

While Charles is wrapping up the picture, I want to know how you got back so early. Your maid said you were going to the Garrick.

CLARA

We told her so. But we went to the moving pictures.

THIEF

You ought not to go to the movies. It will destroy your literary taste and weaken your minds.

CLARA

I don't care for them myself, but Charles won't see anything else.

THIEF

You ought to make him. Men only go to the theater anyway because their wives take them. They'd rather stay at home or play billiards. You have a chance right there. Charles will go where you take him. By and by he will begin to like it. Now to-night there was a Granville Barker show at the Garrick, and you went to the movies to see a woman whose idea of cuteness is to act as if she had a case of arrested mental development.

SHAM

CHARLES (*entering, doing up picture*)

Silly old films, anyway. But Clara *will* go. Goes afternoons when I'm not here, and then drags me off again in the evening. Here's your picture, as soon as I get it tied up. Can't tell you how grateful we are. Shall we make it unanimous, Clara?

CLARA

I haven't the vote, you know. Clumsy! give me the picture.

THIEF

Don't try to thank me. If you'll give up this shamming I'll feel repaid for my time and trouble (*looking at watch*) By Jove! it's far too much time. I must make tracks this minute. I'll feel repaid if you'll take my advice about the theater for one thing, and—why don't you bundie all this imitation junk together and sell it and get one genuine good thing?
(*Clara leaves, apparently for more string*)

CHARLES

Who'd buy them?

THIEF

There must be other people in the world with taste as infallibly bad as yours.

CHARLES

Call that honest?

THIEF

Certainly. I'm not telling you to sell them as relics. You couldn't in the first place, except to a home for the aged and indigent blind. But I know a man who needs them. They'd rejoice

his heart. They'd be things of beauty to him. I wish I could help you pick out something with your money. But I don't dare risk seeing you again.

CLARA (*re-entering, with the picture tied*)

Why not? There's honor among thieves.

THIEF

There *is*. If you were thieves, I'd know just how far to trust you. Now, I'd be willing to trust Charles as man to man. Gentleman's agreement. But (*looking at Clara*) I don't know—

CHARLES

Clara is just as honest as we are—with her own class. But your profession puts you outside the pale with her; you're her natural enemy. You haven't any rights. But you've been a liberal education for us both.

THIEF

I've been liberal. You meet me—listen!—there are footsteps on the porch. I—I've waited too long. Here I've stood talking—

CHARLES

Well, stop it now, can't you. I don't see how you've ever got anywhere. Hide!

THIEF

No, it can't be done. If you'll play fair, I'm safe enough here in this room, safer than anywhere else. Pretend I'm a friend of yours. You will? Gentleman's agreement? (*he shakes hands with Charles*)

SHAM

CHARLES

Gentleman's agreement. My word of honor.

CLARA (*offers her hand as Charles starts for the door*)

Gentleman's agreement, but only in this. I haven't forgiven you for what you've said. If I ever get you in a tight place—look out.

THIEF (*taking her hand*)

Don't tell more than the one necessary lie. It's so easy to get started in that sort of thing. Stick to it that I'm a friend of the family and that I've been spending the evening. God knows I have!

CLARA

I'll try to stick to that. But can't I improvise a little? It's such fun!

THIEF

Not a bit. Not one little white lie.

CHARLES (*entering with a young man behind him*)

It's a man from the *News*. He says he was out here on another story and he's got a big scoop. There's been some artistic burglary in the neighborhood and he's run onto it. I told him we hadn't lost anything and that we don't want to get into the papers; but he wants us to answer a few questions.

REPORTER

Please do. I need some stuff about the neighborhood.

CLARA

I don't know, Charles, but that it's our duty. (*She smiles wickedly at the thief*) Something

SHAM

we say may help catch the thieves. Perhaps we owe it to law and order.

REPORTER

That's right. Would you object if I used your name?

(Charles and the thief motion to Clara to keep still, but throughout the rest of the conversation she disregards their frantic signals, and sails serenely on.)

CLARA

I don't know that we should mind if you mention us nicely. Will the Hempsteds be in? I shan't mind it, if they don't.

REPORTER

Good for you. Now, have you—

CLARA

We *have* missed something. We haven't had time to look thoroughly, but we do know that one of our pictures is gone.

(The men are motioning to her, but she goes on sweetly.)

REPORTER

A-a-ah! Valuable picture. He hasn't taken anything that wasn't best of its class. Remarkable chap. Must be the same one that rifled the Pierpont collection of illuminated manuscripts. Culled the finest pieces without a mistake.

THIEF *(interested)*

He made one big mistake. He—*(stops short)*

REPORTER

Know the Pierponts?

S H A M

THIEF

Er—ye-es. I've been in their house. (*Retires from the conversation. Clara smiles.*)

REPORTER

Well, believe me, if he's taken anything, your reputation as collectors is made. Picture, eh? Old master, I suppose?

CLARA

A family portrait. We treasured it for that. Associations, you know.

REPORTER

Must have been valuable, all right. Depend on him to know. He don't run away with any junk. Who was the artist?

CLARA

We don't know—definitely.

REPORTER

Never heard it attributed to anybody?

CLARA

We don't care to make any point of such things. But there have been people who have thought—it was not—a—a Gilbert Stuart.

CHARLES

Clara!

CLARA

I don't know much about such things myself. But our friend (*nods toward the thief*), Mr.—Mr. Hibbard—who has some reputation as a collector, has always said that it was—not. In spite of that fact, he had offered to take it off our hands.

S H A M

CHARLES

Clara, you're going too far—

REPORTER

She's quite right. You're wrong, Mr. Hibbard. You may be good, but this fellow KNOWS. Too bad you didn't take it while the taking was good. This fellow never sells. Of course he can't exhibit. Just loves beautiful things. No, sir, it was real.

THIEF (*between his teeth*)

It wasn't. Of all the—

CLARA (*smiling*)

You take your beating so ungracefully, Mr. Hibbard. The case, you see, is all against you.

THIEF

Be careful. The picture may be found at any minute. Don't go too far.

CLARA

I hardly think it will be found unless the thief is caught. And I have such perfect confidence in his good sense that I don't expect that.

REPORTER

Lots of time for a getaway. When was he here?

CLARA

He was gone when we came from the theater. But we must almost have caught him. Some of our finest things were gathered together here on the table ready for his flight. How he must have hated to leave them, all the miniatures and the cloisone. I almost feel sorry for him.

SHAM

CHARLES

I do.

CLARA

You see, we went to the Garrick for the Granville Barker show. Mr. Hibbard took us (*she smiles sweetly at him*) I'm devoted to the best in drama and I always insist that Charles and Mr. Hibbard shall take me only to the finest things. And now we come home to find our—You're sure it was a Gilbert Stuart?—gone.

THIEF

I've got to be getting out of here! Can't stay a minute longer! Charles, I wish you luck in that reform we were speaking of, but I haven't much hope (*looking at Clara*) There is such a thing as total depravity. Oh, here! (*taking package from under his arm*) What am I thinking of? I was running away with your package (*hands it to Clara*)

CLARA (*refusing it*)

Oh, but it's yours, Mr. Hibbard. I couldn't think of taking it. Really, you must keep it to remember us by. Put it among your art treasures at home, next to your lovely illuminated manuscripts, and whenever you look at it remember us and this delightful evening, from which we are all taking away so much. You must keep it—that's part of the bargain, isn't it? And now are we even?

THIEF

Even? Far from it. I yield you your woman's right to the last word, and I admit it's the best (*stoops and kisses her hand*) Good-night,

SHAM

Clara. (*To the reporter*) May I give you a lift back to town?

REPORTER

Thanks. As far as the Hempsted's corner. Good-night. Thank you for this much help. (*Exeunt.*)

CHARLES

Thank goodness, they've gone. What relief! That pace is too rapid for me. You had me running round in circles. But he's got the picture, and we're safe at last. But don't you think, Clara, you took some awful risks. You goaded him pretty far.

CLARA

I had to. Did you hear him call me Clara?

CHARLES

He had to (*chuckling*) He doesn't know our name. But he wasn't a bad fellow, was he? I couldn't help liking him in spite of his impudence.

CLARA

You showed it. You took sides with him against me all the time the reporter was here. But, you know, he was right about our house. It's all wrong. The Hempsteds would see it in a minute. I believe I'll clear out this cabinet and have this room done over in mahogany.

CHARLES

Too expensive this winter.

CLARA

Birch will do just as well—nobody knows the difference. Listen! is he coming back?

SHAM

REPORTER (*in the doorway*)

Excuse me—listen. Mr. Hibbard says you've given him the wrong package. He says you need this to go with the picture of your grandmother. And he says, sir, that you need to get wise to your own family. He's waiting for me. Good-night! (*Exit*)

CHARLES (*angrily*)

Get wise to my own family? He may know all about art (*undoing the picture*) but I guess I know my own relatives. (*Holds up picture so that audience can see it, but he can't*) And if that isn't a picture of my own cousin Paul, I'll eat—(*sees Clara laughing*) What the devil! (*Looks at picture, which represents George Washington*) Clara! you did that! (*laughs uproariously*) You little cheat!

CURTAIN.

Joe

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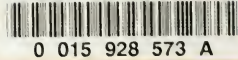
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